(d) whether the new laws would affect the Indian businesses in Russia too?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) Yes.

(b) As per new visa procedures, stemming from a new Law for Foreigners adopted by the Russian Federation, before issuing visas to travellers to the Russian Federation, including Indian travellers, the Embassies and the Consulates General of the Russian Federation seek clearance from their Ministry of Interior. They also require the visa applicants to produce an invitation from recognised Russian institutions. The invitation itself has to be processed through the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. These procedural requirements, along with some others, result in delays in issuance of visas and cause difficulties for the Indian travellers. These difficulties have been pointed out to the Russian authorities.

(c) Given the adverse impact of these new visa regulations on development of overall bilateral relations, including trade and economic ties, the Government of India regularly takes up the issue of a more liberalized visa regime for various categories of visitors from India, including trade and business representatives, in bilateral interactions with the Russian Federation. The Government of India recognises that the issue of visas for foreign nationals is the sovereign right of the country concerned.

(d) Yes.

Allegation on India to use excessive force in J&K

5055. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of some recent U.S. report that India is using excessive force in Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) whether with the said accusation Government's ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence has been put to mark; and

(c) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) yes. This allegation was made in the U.S. State Department's annual "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" for 2002, released on 31 March, 2003.

(b) No.

(c) Government does not take cognisance of an internal exercise of the U.S. Government and it has no bearing on Government's ability to deal with the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Extradition of Abu Salem

5056. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is a fact that the Portuguese Legal Authorities have told their Government that Abu Salem wanted in connection with 1993 Mumbai blasts can be deported to India;

(b) If so, how India is going to secure the return of Salem in the absence of an extradition treaty with Lisbon; and

(c) the details of the procedure to get around the legal requirements of an Extradition treaty?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA) : (a) Request for extradition of Abu Salem, who was arrested in Portugal in 2002 on the basis of an Interpol Red Corner Alert, is under consideration of the Portugese authorities.

(b) and (c) Absence of Extradition Treaty does not bar consideration of an extradition request. In view of friendly relations with India, Portugal agreed to consider India's request for extradition of Abu Salem under its domestic laws

Malta Boat Tragedy

5057. SHRI B. P. SINGHAL : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of Malta Boat Tragedy that occurred on the 25th December, 1996 killing 3000 youths from India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan;

(b) if so, whether Government would release the list of the Indian victims and provide relief to their families; and

(c) if so, by when if not the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA) : (a) Yes, but the total number of victims was estimated to be only 300.